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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7803rd meeting

Tuesday, 8 November 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Seck	(Senegal)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 28 October 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/911)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Letter dated 28 October 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/911)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/911, which contains a letter dated 28 October 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the fiftieth report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I now give the floor to Mr. Inzko.

Mr. Inzko: In my remarks today, I want to talk about two trends that are developing in parallel in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one positive and one quite negative.

To begin with, the open and helping hand extended to Bosnia and Herzegovina by the European Union (EU) has led to further progress, with the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and a domestic EU Coordination Mechanism finally agreed. State and entity-level authorities have also continued to make certain progress on economic reforms. Following these steps, on 20 September the EU General Affairs Council invited the European Commission to submit an opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU membership, which is a truly momentous development. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a member of the EU, and not even a candidate yet, but it has taken a decision about its future. It has taken a decision about its direction. This is wholeheartedly supported by a large majority of the population.

Another positive development took place in June with the publishing of the first post-war census, an essential tool for socioeconomic planning. While arguments over the census soured the political environment, tensions increased significantly, first with the decision by the Republika Srpska National Assembly in July to hold an entity referendum, in defiance of an earlier decision of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court, and then with the actual holding of the referendum in September, in direct contravention of a second decision suspending the referendum until the Court could decide on disputes concerning its constitutionality.

The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is also annex 4 of the Peace Agreement, states explicitly that decisions of the Constitutional Court, as in our own countries, are final and binding, and that the entities are bound to comply with the decisions of the State authorities. For this reason, I consider the referendum of 25 September to be a grave violation of the Peace Agreement and the rule of law. It was held in contravention of decisions of the Court, including a direct order suspending the referendum.

The positive diplomatic role played by neighbouring Serbia and Croatia during the crisis is worth noting. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić declined to support the referendum — he did so twice, in public — while Prime Minister designate of Croatia Andrej Plenković condemned it outright.

With this unprecedented step, the authorities of Republika Srpska established that they do not consider themselves bound by Constitutional Court decisions with which they do not agree, effectively opting out of the country's judicial system. For example, the President told media that he would also order Republika Srpska institutions not to follow a final decision of another institution, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a case related to the ownership of military property. Similarly, the President publicly rejected a summons to give a statement to the State Prosecutor regarding the referendum.

In addition to being a fundamental challenge to the State's sovereignty, the constitutional order and the rule of law, the September referendum should be seen in the context of the long-standing policy of the ruling party in the Republika Srpska, and its President in particular, to deny the authority of the common State institutions and to advocate openly for the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In their public statements during the reporting period, the Republika Srpska President and other officials of his party clearly linked the referendum with possible future secession, describing it as the first in a series, to possibly include referendums against the State institutions or NATO, on the status of the Republika Srpska, and on independence. Would we tolerate similar moves for secession in our own countries?

However, in recent weeks we have witnessed another staggering development in the Republika Srpska. This was the move by the Republika Srpska National Assembly and its speaker Nedeljko Čubrilović to decorate a number of convicted war criminals, including Radovan Karadžić, who was sentenced by a United Nations tribunal in the first instance to 40 years' imprisonment for genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war. This deeply offended the survivors of ethnic cleansing and many others. This act of officially decorating and glorifying war criminals who have been sentenced by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia is unprecedented in modern and civilized history. For me, those who have initiated the decoration of those internationally convicted war criminals, and who are thereby glorifying genocide, are barbarians and outside the orbit of civilized society. They do not belong to it any longer. They are on the wrong side of history.

On 2 October, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina voted in the country's sixth local elections since the war. Unfortunately, parties that focused on polarizing rhetoric and ethnic division generally saw the greatest gains at the ballot box. While the conduct of elections was largely peaceful, electoral irregularities and unrest in the southern town of Stolac resulted in a suspension of the vote, which will need to be repeated as soon as possible.

In Srebrenica, a place of genocide in 1995, as confirmed by two United Nations tribunals, legal challenges still dominate the media. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the mayor of Srebrenica be a mayor working in the interests of all citizens of the town. In Mostar, citizens were again unable to participate in elections due to the failure of political parties to agree on needed changes to the election law. The fact that the citizens of Mostar have not elected local representatives since 2008 is a stain on democracy and another demonstration of how the rule of law continues to deteriorate. Compounding these political difficulties, some prominent Croat leaders more persistently advocated for internal territorial changes during the reporting period, calling for federalization or the creation of a third entity, which did little to help the overall political environment.

As I mentioned earlier, we as the international community need to take an honest look at two trends developing in parallel in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first is one of positive steps taken by the Government in Bosnia and Herzegovina towards reforms aimed at EU integration — which I wholeheartedly support — culminating in the truly significant fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina has now taken a decisive step towards candidacy status with the European Union. This is a truly historic act that is seen only once in a lifetime. This positive trend cannot be denied, and I believe that it is the duty of all of us gathered here today to fully embrace it.

The second trend, however, is the tendency of some political actors to return to the divisive and destructive agendas of the past and, in the case of the Republika Srpska referendum, to assert that neither the Dayton Peace Agreement nor the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina can limit their actions. With this referendum, I believe that we as the international community, need to ask ourselves how long these two dynamics can be sustained before the second overwhelms the first. Or to put it another way, can we accept that some of the country's leaders work for European Union integration and the internal disintegration of the country at the same time? Can we accept that some speak about European values but at the same time glorify war criminals and thus genocide?

Moving forward, I believe that the answer for us as an international community is to send a strong message to those authorities and leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina who openly reject the rule of law and seek to reopen the wounds of the past that they will not lead their constituencies to prosperity or integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. Instead, they will lead themselves into isolation. The leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina — with the help and guidance of the

international community — must recommit to making Bosnia and Herzegovina a peaceful, stable, functional and multi-ethnic country that is fully and irreversibly integrated into European structures.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Inzko for his briefing.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/935, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in French*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2315 (2016).

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by welcoming Mr. Inzko back to the Security Council and by thanking him for his report (S/2016/911, annex) and for his briefing just now. As High Representative, he has the United Kingdom's full and continuous support in his efforts to help Bosnian authorities overcome the challenges that they face.

As penholder for the Western Balkans this month, the United Kingdom warmly welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016) today. The deterrence and security provided by the European Union-led stabilization force (EUFOR ALTHEA) are fundamental during this period of reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The united show of support for the continuation of the Mission is a clear message to the people and the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina relaying the Council's commitment to the country's stability, security and territorial integrity. Such a message comes at an important time. The past 12 months have been eventful, both for reform and the country's future in the European Union and for political upheaval, the persistence of divisive rhetoric and, sadly, challenges to the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

That was most clearly seen in the decision by the Republika Srpska authorities to hold a referendum in September, in clear violation of the ruling of the Constitutional Court. At heart, that decision was not about a national day. It was instead a direct challenge to an integral part of the Framework Agreement. As set out in annex 4, the Constitutional Court is vital to the Agreement's implementation, and, as also set out in annex 4, the Court's decisions are final and binding. Therefore, when a decision is ignored, the legitimacy of the Dayton institutions is threatened. Such attacks are unacceptable and destabilizing, and I strongly condemn them in this Chamber today.

However, it is important to note that the challenge posed by the referendum went far beyond what is set out in the Framework Agreement. It evoked dark and divisive sentiments that have not been seen or heard for many years, but that are clearly still lingering just below the surface. It evoked words of war, hatred and division that have no place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I therefore call on political leaders of all sides and on all parties to refrain from such divisive nationalist rhetoric. It only distracts from the real issues, where progress is so desperately needed.

Take Mostar, for example: for over eight years the people of that town have been unable to elect their own representatives. Instead, they have existed in a frozen stalemate where progress has been held hostage by division. Let us call on all the relevant parties to reach an agreement to allow elections to be held. I also hope that the authorities can quickly resolve the issues in Stolac, so as to allow the failed elections there to take place as soon as possible. Elsewhere, we hope that, following the election in Srebrenica, the new mayor will work for the benefit of all communities. It is crucial to see a renewed focus on reconciliation and the local economy, so that all citizens see a future in that municipality. For all the challenges of the past 12 months, the leaders of the country have also made reforms aimed at moving away from the rhetoric and the division. In February, Bosnia and Herzegovina applied formally to join the European Union, and in September we saw all 28 European Union Foreign Ministers agreeing to task the

Commission to review that membership application. Those are significant steps forward.

We should all welcome the progress made on the reform agenda. It shows what Bosnian leaders can do when they work together. Let us all encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina's leadership to continue making progress on that agenda, so that all of their citizens can benefit from the prosperity and security afforded by Euro-Atlantic integration. In that effort, they will have no stronger supporter than the United Kingdom.

However, in order to make progress, further efforts are required with regard to registering defence property, which is needed for the activation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Membership Action Plan and for progress on the 5+2 agenda. Nevertheless, until those efforts bear fruit, we remain committed to the continuing role of the High Representative and his Office.

Mr. Inzko continues to have our full support as the final authority in-theatre regarding the civilian implementation of the General Framework Agreement, which includes supporting the use of his Bonn powers, if the situation requires. That is because as High Representative, together with EUFOR ALTHEA, he has a vital role to play in Bosnia and Herzegovina until stability and security are firmly entrenched.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Hercegovina, for his thorough briefing before the Council on the latest developments in the implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Egypt expresses its full support to him in carrying out his mandate.

Egypt welcomes the positive political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the past period, particularly the European Union's approval of the official application presented by Bosnian authorities to join the European Union. That shows the Bosnian Government's persistence in pressing ahead with carrying out the requisite reforms with a view to achieving integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions in a manner that fosters the stability of the country and contributes to the efforts to achieve the comprehensive development aspired to by the Bosnian people.

At the same time, Egypt expresses its grave concern about the deterioration in the overall political climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in the wake of the decision by the Republika Srpska to organize a plebiscite to commemorate "Republika Srpska Day", in contravention of two decisions by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

That was described by the High Representative today in his report (S/2016/911, annex) as constituting a grave violation by the Republika Srpska of its obligations under the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Constitution of the country. That came in addition to further intimations by Republika Srpska officials about the possibility of organizing further referendums, including one on the status of the region.

The insistence by Bosnian Serb officials not to respect the decisions of courts in general demonstrates a failure to apply the rule of law and negatively affects the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That was accompanied by a launch of nationalistic calls from certain political parties in Republika Srpska for the secession of the Serbian entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to other calls to redemarcate the internal borders of the federal Republic. That constitutes a serious threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia. That fallout will affect not only Bosnia and Herzegovina but also the entire Balkan region. Hence, we call upon all of the political leaders to place the joint interests of the Bosnian people over the narrow ethnic political interests of any particular ethnic group, which would only thwart progress and stability.

We wish to state that if those challenges are not addressed in a serious, comprehensive and consensual framework, with the participation of all Bosnian political parties, the political achievements made since the signing of the Dayton Agreement will be undermined. That Agreement remains the prevailing reference point for the region and the main guarantee of its stability. In that connection, Egypt would like to highlight the need for all parties to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, national Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the decisions issued by the country's judiciary.

Once again, we emphasize our full backing for the efforts of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in confronting the dangers of terrorism. We are ready to extend all forms of support to efforts to confront extremists and aberrant ideologies, particularly efforts

aimed at fighting violent religious speech and at rectifying flawed religious concepts.

In conclusion, Egypt reasserts the need to intensify efforts aimed at implementing the 5+2 agenda in full, as well as the need for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to earnestly emphasize the concepts of sociopolitical coexistence, and, concomitantly, to press ahead with the cause of peace and action, which also requires sincere international and regional backing for those efforts.

Ms. Coleman (United States of America): I thank High Representative Inzko for his service in representing the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and for his stewardship of the Office of the High Representative.

The United States welcomes the unanimous adoption today of resolution 2315 (2016). Among its provisions, the resolution authorizes the extension of a Chapter VII mandate for the EUFOR ALTHEA mission and the NATO presence for an additional year. It reaffirms the final authority of the High Representative in the interpretation of civilian aspects of the Dayton Agreement and reaffirms that any amendments to Bosnia and Herzegovina's Constitution must be made in accordance with the amendment procedures set out therein. The resolution demonstrates the unity of the Security Council in its support for the agreements reached in Dayton, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as support for those who seek to protect those fundamental rights, including High Representative Inzko.

The High Representative's role, while always pivotal, has been particularly important this year, as certain elements have worked against the unity that Bosnia and Herzegovina has striven for over the past 20 years. His briefing today underscores why the Council must remain vigilant against those who seek to undermine the constitutional order in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Republika Srpska's decision to hold its referendum in September, in contravention of a Constitutional Court order, made it clear that Republika Srpska President Dodik and other politicians are systematically attempting to erode the competencies of State-level institutions. As the High Representative highlighted in his report (S/2016/911, annex), the direct rejection of the Constitutional Court by the Republika Srpska means that it has effectively opted out of the judicial system, out of the State, and has thereby fundamentally rejected the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the High Representative goes on to say in the report, the referendum is viewed by observers on both sides as a possible prelude to further referendums on status questions regarding the Republika Srpska. Such purposeful destabilization is unacceptable and threatens to send the country down a fractious path.

The United States looks forward to the day when Bosnia and Herzegovina meets the objectives and conditions established by the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative, and to the day when we can say with absolute confidence that Bosnia and Herzegovina has reached full compliance with the Dayton Agreement and has become a peaceful, viable State, irreversibly on course for European integration. But that day has still not arrived — delayed, in part, because divisive rhetoric and destabilizing actions on the part of certain elements within Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to erode and degrade the vital institutions necessary for progress.

Further progress for Bosnia and Herzegovina on political and socioeconomic reforms, on European Union and NATO membership and on ensuring basic rights for its people, such as the right to vote in Mostar, requires commitment from all sides. The United States commends the continued work of EUFOR ALTHEA and of NATO, through its headquarters in Sarajevo, and wholeheartedly supports the renewal of their mandates. We are pleased that Bosnia and Herzegovina's defence review is advancing, and we look forward to that document, which will further reforms in the defence sector. However, that progress cannot overshadow the fact that the registration of defence properties in the Republika Srpska continues to be blocked. We call on Republika Srpska President Dodik to ease his unhelpful rhetoric and inaction on that issue.

Finally, we welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress in the European Union membership process this year, as well as the Government's dedication to its reform agenda. Continuing down that path will require vision, political will and real follow through on commitments and, most important, compromise and unity.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank High Representative Valentin Inzko for his briefing and for his comprehensive report (S/2016/911, annex) to the

Security Council, including the special report on the referendum in the Republika Srpska.

Based on the briefing and the reports, my delegation is deeply concerned about the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the reporting period and about the direction in which the country is heading. Of particular concern to us is the viability of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the Agreement is being increasingly challenged and violated. We can trace the various political contentions in the country to its ethnic fault lines, from the dispute over the 2013 census results, the referendum on the Republika Srpska National Day, the continuing failure to implement the ruling of the Constitutional Court on the electoral system for Mostar, to the secessionist agenda of some quarters in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In that context, we recognize the crucial need for the Council to send a united message via resolution 2315 (2016) to urge the parties to abide by the commitment to cooperate fully with all institutions involved in the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to reaffirm the existence of two entities under the Peace Agreement, as upheld by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The holding of the referendum by the Republika Srpska on 25 September was carried out in complete disregard of final and binding decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It represents the latest act of defiance by the Republika Srpska on the judicial institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in violation of the Framework Agreement. We have seen persistent challenges by the Republika Srpska to the State's judicial system in the past, including its disregard of the Bosnian Constitutional Court's decisions on the registration of defence property. More recently, the President of the Republika Srpska chose to ignore the summons by the State Prosecutor's Office relating to the referendum of 25 September. It is simply unacceptable for the Republika Srpska to pick and choose which decisions of the State's judicial system it is willing to obey. Such actions are in violation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and the State's Constitution. They also constitute a dangerous precedent, especially in the context of divisive secessionist rhetoric and increasing attacks on the authority of the High Representative. Self-serving and divisive politics is a dangerous game that gets played at the expense of the future of the country, especially given its traumatic history. We therefore urge all parties to renounce their divisive politics and secessionist agendas and to abide by the State's Constitution, the various relevant Security Council resolutions and the Dayton Peace Agreement for the sake of peace and stability in the region.

Malaysia is encouraged by some positive developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the reporting period. We particularly welcome the progress made by the country towards integration into the European Union (EU), which remains central to the aspirations of its people. Malaysia also welcomes the increase in foreign direct investments in the first quarter of 2016. The Government must remain steadfast in implementing its reform agenda, particularly in addressing youth unemployment, fighting corruption, instilling good governance and strengthening the rule of law. It needs to remain focused on economic growth and development and the creation of a promising future for all. We also commend the ongoing commitment of Bosnia and Herzegovina to countering violent extremism, as can be seen in the recent sentencing of seven individuals for joining or attempting to join the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant as foreign terrorist fighters.

On the issue of the return of refugees and displaced persons, we wish to see further progress by the authorities in order to create conducive political, economic and social conditions for their voluntary return and harmonious reintegration and reconciliation.

Malaysia reiterates the need to intensify efforts to fully implement the 5+2 agenda as a condition for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. That agenda seeks to promote collaboration among the political actors and stakeholders, and not adversarial politics. Until then, Malaysia reaffirms its strong support for the Office of the High Representative, as laid out in the Dayton Peace Agreement and as upheld in various Council resolutions. We condemn the intimidation and death threats levelled against the High Representative and call for their prompt and thorough investigation in conformity with the rule of law.

We also recognize the important stabilizing role played by the EU-led multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We therefore welcome the renewal of its mandate and the Council's unity in adopting resolution 2315 (2016).

In conclusion, Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to the independence, sovereignty, national unity and

territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have long supported the country in its reconstruction efforts after the war and will continue to do so with a view to strengthening the country's nation-building, inclusive democracy, reconciliation and economic progress.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Many thanks to Ambassador Valentin Inzko for his presentation of his biannual report (S/2016/911, annex) and, more important, many thanks for the special report on the referendum held on 25 September in the Republika Srpska.

I also wish to express our appreciation for the adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which once again points to the multinational commitment to stabilization on the part of the European Union, which has played a positive and commendable role in supporting the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

By way of a preliminary remark, I wish to endorse the contents of the statement to be delivered by the observer of the EU.

The year 2016 has been a major year for Bosnia and Herzegovina, marked by a series of landmark events. I wish to point to one of those events — 15 February, which is when Bosnia and Herzegovina's candidacy for integration into the European Union was presented — which points to the beginning of a path that will not be easy, a path that Spain knows well. I can affirm that, in the end, it is a path towards progress and stability. Bosnia and Herzegovina has already taken the first important steps on that path towards the European Union. I will highlight three steps.

The first step is the implementation of the reform agenda. The second step is the adaption of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The third step is the adoption, on 23 Augus,t of the coordination mechanism for European Union matters. We welcome those steps, but in order to continue along the positive path, it is absolutely necessary that all actors and relevant political forces address and come up with a solution to those issues that are of the greatest concern to the population. I think that one of the greatest concerns has to do with respect for the rule of law, which is an irreplaceable and essential pillar of any State and which is the foundation of the European Union. It is for that reason that I most lament those cases where we have seen actions against the rule of law, against established legislation, against the authority of institutions and in particular against the authority of the Bosnian Constitutional Court with respect to its decision of 17 September on the convening and holding of a referendum in the Republika Srpska.

Spain calls on all institutional and political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be guided in all their conduct by the need to fulfil legal requirements. We also want to see, once and for all, an end to divisive rhetoric, and we unequivocally condemn any incitement to hatred. The political leaders of the three communities are especially responsible for seeking reconciliation and ensuring that everyone can live peacefully together.

I cannot conclude without reiterating Spain's support for the work carried out by the High Representative. It is our desire to see necessary progress made as soon as possible in order to ensure that the five objectives are met and the two conditions for the conclusion of his mandate. I also wish to recall my previous statement (see S/PV.7688) on this issue here in the Security Council in which I expressed the unequivocal support of Spain for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as our conviction that the stability of the region as a whole is inseparable from the political stability and progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I wish to express my gratitude to Ambassador Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzogovina, for his informative briefing. Japan appreciates the High Representative's ongoing contribution to peace and stability in the country. We also welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which supports the implementation of the Dayton Agreement.

The Dayton Agreement was the best and wisest choice available to the international community in 1995. I remember being struck by what I saw when I visited Sarajevo as the Chief Political Officer for United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo in 1999. In addition to the ravages of war, I saw a total lack of communication, five years following the Agreement. The town of Pale in the Republika Srpska — just 13 kilometres away from Sarajevo, on the other side of the mountain — had no interaction at all with Sarajevo. I recall hoping that the ethnic tensions would be resolved over time through efforts by all sides to overcome the very difficult matter of ethnic tension.

As a member of the Peace Implementation Council, Japan has contributed to the implementation of the Peace Agreement by emphasizing mutuality among

different ethnic groups. Since the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, ethnic tensions have continued to affect the Balkans. When I was in Kosovo, the prevailing perspective was that the Dayton Agreement had sowed interim stability, and it was our belief that in the long term, Kosovo's borders would become unnecessary and meaningless in tandem with its regional integration within the European Union (EU). Japan therefore welcomes the decision by the EU General Affairs Council to accept the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for membership in the EU. We also welcome the approval of the Extended Fund Facility to Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund, which will enhance economic stability.

It is nonetheless disappointing to see actions that foment ethnically based divisions and run contrary to the vision of the Dayton Agreement. Japan is particularly concerned about the impact on the stability of the country of the referendum in the Republika Srpska. The referendum was held against the orders of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As it has done for the past quarter century, the international community must continue to provide the vision to resolve the ethnic tensions that have plagued the region. The future is in reconciliation, not in confrontation. The future is in integration, including market integration, not in secession. Member States should bolster reconciliation and avoid fanning ethnic tensions. The Security Council must speak with one voice in urging dialogue among the various ethnic groups.

The Office of the High Representative continues to be vital for the peace and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Japan will continue to fully support Ambassador Inzko and his Office to that end.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Inzko, for his briefing.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important country in the Balkans. It is in the interests of the international community in general, and of regional States in particular, that it maintain peace and stability, advance coordinated socioeconomic development and achieve harmonious coexistence among all ethnic groups. The international community should take a balanced and prudent approach on the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina and pay attention to and heed the views and concerns of all parties concerned.

China welcomes the achievement by Bosnia and Herzegovina in advancing national reconciliation, promoting economic development and strengthening the rule of law. We have noted that the country is still faced by difficulties and challenges in its pursuit of national stability and development. We hope that Bosnian people of all ethnicities will work actively to consolidate the results of the political process, engage in dialogue to settle their differences, comprehensively implement the Dayton Peace Agreement and continue to strive for greater progress in all areas so that Bosnian people of all ethnicities can share in the peace dividend.

China respects the independence, sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We respect the choice made by the Bosnian people with regard to the future of their country, and we support Bosnian people of all ethnicities in living harmoniously and seeking development together. We welcome the efforts by High Representative Inzko to promote the political process of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We hope that, according to his mandate, he will continue to play a positive role in promoting the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

China welcomes the adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which extends the mandate of EUFOR ALTHEA, the EU-led peacekeeping force. We hope that EUFOR ALTHEA will continue to maintain close cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina and play a constructive role in maintaining the peace and stability of the country. China is willing to work with the international community and continue to contribute to the realization of the lasting peace, stability and development of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We welcome Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thank him for the fiftieth report (S/2016/911, annex) of the High Representative to the Security Council. We commend his work in support of the implementation of the General Framework Agreement and for the consolidation of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which extends the mandate of the multinational stabilization force EUFOR ALTHEA for an additional 12-month period, focused on capacity-building and

training and to contribute to Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities' deterrence capacity.

Angola is fully committed to respecting and supporting the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the General Framework Agreement for Peace. In our statement, we will basically focus on three issues: the general political environment, challenges to the General Framework Agreement and the lack of cooperation with the High Representative.

We are concerned about the political environment prevailing in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The holding of a referendum in September by the Republika Srpska authorities is in violation of ruling of the Constitutional Court that stipulates that any referendum must be consistent with the country's Constitution and the General Framework Agreement. The Republika Srpska authorities must abide by the Constitutional Court's decisions and avoid, by all means, unilateral elections that might undermine peace and stability in the country.

We welcome the holding of peaceful local elections in October as an important step for the consolidation of peace and democratic institutions in the country. Although they were peaceful in general, the elections were marked by inter-ethnic incidents, irregularities and unrest in some polling stations. The electoral process should be completed and voting held where it has not taken place. We urge the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to create political and socioeconomic conditions conducive to the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons in their territories and communities of origin, while strengthening reconciliation and social cohesion so as to consolidate peace, healing and forgiveness.

Regarding the challenges to the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are very worried by the statements made by high officials that challenge the country's territorial integrity. The provocations by the Republika Srpska authorities, such as offering congratulations to war criminals, should be universally condemned. Such statements and actions threaten the General Framework Agreement and Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence. They help to undermine a multi-ethnic society's cohesion and the country's unity and national reconciliation. In line with resolution 2315 (2016), we reaffirm that Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two entities by virtue of its Constitution, and that any change to the Constitution must be made in accordance with the procedure it prescribes.

Regarding the lack of cooperation with the High Representative, we reject the decision of the Republika Srpska authorities to deny him access to information and documents, as required under annex 10 of the General Framework Agreement, and we call on them to allow him access, as requested by his Office, that will enable him to carry out his mandated duties accordingly.

In conclusion, we commend the European Union for its support to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the security and defence sectors and in the implementation of socioeconomic, rule-of-law and public administration reforms. We call on the European Union to continue helping the country to overcome its remaining challenges and to implement the reforms. Today's adoption of resolution 2315 (2016) gives expression to that commitment. Lastly, we call on the international community, and the United Nations in particular, to continue supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina in fully implementing the Peace Agreement, which is key to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina's attainment of stability, peace and security and well-being, as well as in the Balkans as a whole.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, we are grateful to our United Kingdom colleagues for their constructive approach during the consultations and willingness to take our chief concerns into consideration, enabling us to support today's Security Council resolution 2015 (2016) on extending Operation Althea of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After thoroughly studying the reports of Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, we are compelled to conclude that, like similar previous reports, they do not attempt to assess what is happening in the country objectively. We regret the fact that despite our frequent appeals and warnings, the High Representative, in his actions and public comments, is clearly not giving enough attention to the basic tasks of encouraging intra-Bosnian dialogue and strengthening inter-ethnic trust. We are getting the distinct impression that Mr. Inzko's guiding principle has become an anti-Serbian credo, thereby creating artificial ruptures between the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when his main objective should be to unite them.

Instead of pursuing these seemingly obvious priorities, the High Representative is increasingly sliding into politicized polemic, with the focus on personal sympathies and antipathies. From now on, we repeat that what we want to see in his reports is not a flood of emotion dictated by the current environment, but at least an attempt at impartial analysis of the situation, something that we are firmly believe would be very useful to every member of the Security Council.

With regard to the documents Mr. Inzko presented to the Council, we cannot agree with the tendentious interpretations, taken out of context, of the Republika Srpska referendum held on 25 September on the entity's main holiday, Republika Srpska Day. We believe that a plebiscite held on an issue within the Republika Srpska's constitutional remit in no way threatens the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no need to create artificial problems. Moreover, the steps taken on 25 October by the Republika Srpska authorities, following up on the expression of the electorate's opinion by enacting a new law on Republika Srpska Day, testify unambiguously to Banja Luka's readiness to affirm the holiday's secular and non-discriminatory nature.

Security Council members can acquaint themselves with those and other useful facts in the substantive report of the Republika Srpska Government, which, by tradition, we recommend that our colleagues read and note as a helpful guide to a more objective understanding of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly since for some reason the High Representative's reports purposely do not touch on those Republika Srpska actions. And the abuses of the independent Government's central judicial organs are simply way out of line.

The credibility of the Bosnian State-level justice authorities should be built solely on improving their professionalism, impartiality and effectiveness and ending the process of withdrawing foreign specialists from the staff of the higher judicial authorities, which by definition should be national and independent. The key to that is carrying out thorough reform of the judicial and prosecutorial system on the best possible foundations, which should be developed collectively by Bosnians themselves without any pressure, imposition of ready-made schemes or interference from outside.

We believe that the principle of transferring responsibility for all the country's processes to the Bosnian authorities should define the international community's approach to the other issues that Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently dealing with, whether they concern the publication of the census results, the implementation of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on the well-known *Sejdić and Finci* case or the holding of municipal elections in Mostar. That is why we have consistently advocated for shutting down as soon as possible the remaining elements of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as represented by the High Representative and the Bonn powers, which have outlived their usefulness.

We should recall that in his recent reports the High Representative pays lip service to caring about the importance of respecting the decisions of the Bosnian State structures, but he was not always so scrupulous. In 2011, for the sake of short-term ambitions, he suspended the implementation of the decision of the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a significant blow to its positions as a crucial body for the functioning of democracy in the country. And we are all familiar with the lamentable consequences of that step. That voluntarism vis-à-vis the law proved to be ineffective five years ago and would be all the more inappropriate in the future.

We would once again like to draw attention to the fact that both in his reports and in practice, Mr. Inzko gives too little space to the implementation of the 5+2 plan, adopted almost 10 years ago as one of the conditions for closing the Office of the High Representative. We believe that he should turn his attention back to implementing that programme. And the subject of Bosnia and Herzegovina's relations with the European Union and NATO, which has nothing to do with the High Representative's Dayton mandate and diverts his Office's limited resources, should on the contrary be immediately dispensed with. We are fundamentally opposed to any attempts to use external channels to influence the sovereign choice of the independent State that Bosnia and Herzegovina unquestionably is.

We note that after a series of persistent reminders, the High Representative's reports have begun to touch on the counter-terrorism situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, we hope that future reports will reflect the subject appropriately because Islamic terrorism poses a real threat to the security of Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighbouring countries, unlike something that is occupying much of Mr. Inzko's attention — the anti-Serbian demagoguery. Mr. Inzko

has said that this demagoguery has reached its apogee. Furthermore, in an interview on 1 November with a correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal* he suggested that the Western community needed to rethink the current President. He said:

(*spoke in English*)

> "He was the hope of the West... Dodik is building his own empire... The Western community should think about removing him."

(*spoke in Russian*)

But can an international official of such rank, whose gold standard should be objectivity, neutrality and impartiality, make such a comment? We do not believe the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be as bleak as it is being depicted. In that vein, we would note the municipal elections held on 2 October, which were by and large held normally, as an example; and we wish every success to those representatives who will be taking office at the local level.

The Russian Federation, as a guarantor of the 1995 the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, will continue to help its steadfast implementation, including by guaranteeing genuine equality for all three constituent peoples and the defence of broad authorities of the entities, as outlined in the Dayton Peace Agreement. We will continue to consolidate a beneficial partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels of authority.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I begin by thanking the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina for his briefing and aligning myself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union shortly.

France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which shows that all members of the Council share the same guiding principles with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina: support for the presence of the European Union-led peacekeeping force (EUFOR Althea) while awaiting the strategic review that will be carried out next autumn by the European External Action Service; respect for the aspirationa of all factions in the country that favour a European outlook; and the absolute necessity that all must respect the principles and institutions set forth in the Paris Dayton accords.

The unity of the Council around such a common base sends a message of peace to the region. It recalls that the international community is in agreement in supporting the independence and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which should not be challenged by any of its entities, and in respecting the country's choices, provided that they are in line with international law and the framework established by the peace agreements.

More than 20 years after its signature, the Dayton accords remain the cornerstone of institutional stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that regard, and as many have done before me, we can only deplore the decision made by the authorities of the Republika Srpska to hold a referendum in September on the issue of Republika Srpska Day, in contravention of its suspension by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and hence of the Constitution, which is an integral part of the peace agreements that stipulates that the Court's rulings are final and binding. That decision has led to an unnecessary spiral of tensions between communities and has revived memories of past divisions. We also regret the fact that the local elections on 2 October were not held in Mostar because of a lack of agreement on its status. The inhabitants of Mostar cannot continue to be deprived of their right to choose their own representatives, as they have been for eight years now.

France does not rule out the possibility of a debate being held among the entities on the definition of national holidays or the aspirations of some to improve the functioning of the central State. It nonetheless recalls that any viable solution must come by way of dialogue in good faith among the different stakeholders of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina — the central State and the entities — while respecting constitutional rules. We also call on all the parties to cooperate with the institutions mentioned in the peace agreement, in particular the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the High Representative. The latter has a crucial role to play in promoting peaceful dialogue among the different communities and the entities. Political decision-makers must also fulfil their responsibilities, and we call on them to abandon divisive rhetoric.

Having said that, despite such fragilities we remain convinced that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is today heading in the right direction, towards normalization. Our objective for years to come remains,

without challenging the principles of the Paris Dayton accords, to fully adapt the international presence to current realities.

France welcomes the fact that a European outlook is the main driver of development and consolidation in the country. Last February, Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted its candidacy for accession to the European Union, reflecting the broad support for such an outlook within the country. In that new context, the European Union shall continue more than ever to assist the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing reforms that respond to the economic and social aspirations of the population. The Reform Agenda adopted last year is, in that regard, critical. We welcome the fact that it is already bearing concrete results, such as the adoption of new labour legislation at the entity level. We encourage Bosnian authorities at all levels to intensify their reform efforts to the benefit of the people of the country and in the context of moving Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to Europe.

The European Union mission EUFOR Althea will also pursue its efforts to enable the security forces of Bosnia to operate in an independent fashion and to thereby participate in building a peaceful society looking towards the future. Next autumn, this will be subject of a strategic review within the European Union, as I have already said, that will allow for the drawing up of options for its development in the years to come, taking into account the progress Bosnia and Herzegovina has made towards European rapprochement.

Twenty years after the horror of war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is today advancing in the right direction, with the support of the European Union and its other partners. The responsibility of the international community, and especially the Council, is to encourage it in that direction. The unanimity with which we have adopted resolution 2315 (2016) this morning will undoubtedly contribute to that.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): Ukraine joins the other Council members in welcoming the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016). We are grateful to the United Kingdom delegation for preparing the text and are ready for further active engagement on the issue, including as a member of the relevant Coordination and Drafting Group.

Ukraine also aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

I wish to express my delegation's appreciation to High Representative Valentin Inzko for his leadership of the Office of the High Representative and for his contribution to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. I wish to stress that, despite the attempts of one Council member to question the authorities, under the provisions of the Peace Agreement as was already mentioned, the High Representative is the final authority in theatre regarding interpretation of the said Agreement on the Civilian Implementation of the Peace Settlement.

We are alarmed at the fact that the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has deteriorated. Serious disagreements between the parties persist on many important issues. As a result, Bosnia and Herzegovina was unable to meet the requirements of the 5+2 agenda necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

At the previous Security Council meeting on the subject, in May (see S/PV. 7688), the majority of the Council members, including my delegation, expressed concerns over the statements made by Republika Srpska authorities on possible referendums. My delegation then underscored that any referendum that contradicts the provisions of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Dayton Agreement is illegitimate. Unfortunately, appeals by Council members fell on deaf ears. Ukraine strongly condemns the holding of a referendum by the authorities of Republika Srpska in clear contravention of two final and binding decisions of the Constitutional Court.

I fully agree with the High Representative that that move causes unnecessary tensions and poses a grave challenge to the rule of law. It has serious implications for peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also fully share the High Representative's concern regarding the decoration of a number of war criminals sentenced by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The referendum is the continuation of the policy of Republika Srpska aimed at challenging the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including by threats of separation.

In that light, it is unfortunate that despite the obvious fact that the referendum is an exceptionally dangerous development for the region, one Council member defends this decision and supports the Bosnian Serb leaders in their defiance of the authority of the central bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact,

the authorities of Republika Srpska abuse the special status granted to their entity by the Dayton Agreement. Instead of full compliance with the Peace Agreement to everybody's benefit, they actually undermine the common State, thus blocking Bosnia's political and economic development.

That is a very irresponsible policy — irresponsible towards the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the people of Republika Srpska, who have found themselves living in self-imposed isolation. Just imagine — a new generation has grown up in the country since 1995, and many of them have never been outside Republika Srpska. There are several famous bridges in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the old Mostar bridge and the bridge on the Drina in Višegrad, the very one to which Ivo Andrić referred in his book *The Bridge on the Drina*:

> "Of everything that man erects and builds in his urge for living, nothing is in my eyes better or more valuable than bridges. They are more important than houses, more sacred than shrines. Belonging to everyone and being equal to everyone, useful, always built with a sense, on the spot where most human needs are crossing, they are more durable than other buildings and they do not serve anything secret or bad".

With this message from Ivo Andrić in mind, I believe it is more important to build new bridges in Bosnia and Herzegovina than to burn existing ones.

I would like to remind the Republika Srpska authorities that any referendum must be conducted in a way that is consistent with the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and cannot violate the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ukraine would also like to reaffirm its strong commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and urges the parties to avoid further statements and actions that could make the situation even more difficult.

Now, on a positive note, Ukraine welcomes the progress achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina's European Union (EU) integration process, which is reflected in the European Council conclusions of 20 September 2016. We consider the EU decision to submit an opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for new membership as an important step towards Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration. It is vital to continue efforts to implement the Reform Agenda, which includes socioeconomic issues, the rule of law and public administration reforms. It is also important to demonstrate progress in the functioning of the judiciary and in the fight against corruption and organized crime, and the fight against radicalization and terrorism.

Ukraine welcomes the EU's readiness, as confirmed in the conclusions of the EU Foreign Ministers on 17 October, to continue to play an executive military role in supporting the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities in the maintenance of a safe and secure environment under a new Security Council mandate. In that respect, we also positively note the EU's request that the High Representative present a strategic review in autumn 2017 as the basis for a discussion on options for the future of the operation. It is extremely important to intensify efforts and fully implement the 5+2 agenda.

In the meantime, it is vital to support the actions and reforms needed to reach that milestone and to provide all necessary support to the High Representative as he fulfils his mandate.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his briefing this morning.

I would like to begin by highlighting Uruguay's adherence to the principle of the territorial integrity of States, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Uruguay reaffirms its support for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the consolidation of its unity and in the exercise of its sovereignty.

Respect for institutions and legality is the path towards a stable Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the communities that compose it live together in harmony. In that context, Uruguay attaches the highest value to the rule of law and to the authority of the institutions established by the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and therefore deems it essential to maintain the commitment to fully comply with the 1995 Dayton Agreement. We urge all parties, including the international community, to support any and all efforts to promote peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will also have an impact on stability in the entire region.

Here I would make a special plea to the political players in Bosnia and Herzegovina to conduct themselves responsibly and to engage in a constructive dialogue that will enable them to overcome their differences and focus on national reconciliation and on achieving common objectives, so as to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes a solid and prosperous nation.

The report of the High Representative (S/2016/911, annex) indicates scant progress in achieving the remaining five objectives and two conditions established by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council for the closure of the Office of the High Representative. For that reason, I would point once again to the importance of continuing efforts and maintaining progress in taking forward the 5+2 agenda.

Despite the lack of progress in some areas, Bosnia and Herzegovina has progressed in others, which must be highlighted. I wish in particular to note the climate of security and stability that prevailed during the period despite the inflammatory rhetoric and enabled the peaceful holding of local elections of October.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made progress in implementing its Reform Agenda, adopted in July 2015, which focuses on the socioeconomic issues that directly affect its citizens, and has taken a number of steps towards European Union (EU) integration through its signing of the Protocol on the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the adoption of the EU coordination mechanism.

The international community must continue to support the process of consolidating the peace agreements. We are especially grateful for the work of the European Union-led peacekeeping force Operation Althea, which represents a guarantee of the political and social stability of the country. It is vital that the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to cooperate with the Office of the High Representative until the end of his mandate, once the 5+2 programme has been completed.

I reiterate Uruguay's commitment and our desire to see a stable and sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina that embraces all of its citizens and focuses on their common welfare.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, we would like to thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Valentin Inzko, for his briefing and to reiterate our full support for his work on the matter.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela once again reaffirms its full support and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given that that is one of the fundamental elements of the Charter of the United Nations, we believe that it is a principle that cannot be violated under any circumstances. We believe that the international community must continue to support the implementation of the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace as a way to contribute to a peaceful solution of the differences among the stakeholders concerned.

Today more than ever, at a moment when tensions in the region have increased, we wish to highlight the importance of unequivocal and clear compliance with the Dayton Agreement. Moreover, we must bear in mind that it is incumbent upon the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to lead the efforts related to the future of their country. As part of that process, the ethnic groups must continue to work together in the framework of dialogue that fosters peace, human rights, cooperation and social and economic development, setting aside, once and for all, the tensions and confrontations that tormented the region during the 1990s.

In that context, and on the basis of the principles of impartiality, transparency and constructive work, the High Representative must continue to play a supporting role to promote such efforts and find common ground among the parties through dialogue based on balanced and prudent approaches and with a constructive vision, leaving behind the criticisms that exacerbate animosities, and in which the opinions and views of all stakeholders are reflected.

The European Union's multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina has carried out its work within the framework of the mandate assigned to it, in collaboration with the authorities, to ensure a safe environment for all the ethnic communities. Our country therefore welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which renews its mandate for a further 12 months.

With regard to the fight against terrorism, it is worth mentioning that the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/501)refers to the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and the sentences given to several citizens accused of joining or attempting to join the Islamic

State in Iraq and the Levant. Our country supports the efforts aimed at preventing and fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, which must be accompanied by effective strategies against social exclusion, poverty, violence and intolerant ideologies, with a view to curbing radicalization, with particular emphasis on young people. Furthermore, we must work to effectively implement Security Council and General Assembly resolutions that prohibit the financing, training and transfer of weapons to such groups.

With regard to fighting impunity, we support the work of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which was set up to try those responsible for the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that were committed during the armed conflict in the territories of the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, we reiterate our solidarity with, and support for, Bosnia and Herzegovina for its firm commitment to foster peace and stability in the country for the benefit of its citizens.We are convinced that respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence is essential to achieving those objectives.

Finally, we call on all parties to redouble their efforts to build confidence and work together in the framework of international law, which is necessary for a just and lasting solution that redounds to the benefit of the parties and the entire region.

Mrs. Schwalger (New Zealand): I too welcome High Representative Inzko and the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are pleased that the Council has today reauthorized the European Union (EU) military presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EU-led mission continues to play an important role in supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to maintain a safe and secure environment. The mission also offers capacity-building that helps to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the tools it needs to respond to security threats.

As we heard this morning, Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued to make significant progress toward its goal of EU membership since the Council last discussed the situation in the country (see S/PV.7688). In September, another milestone was reached when the European Commission was asked to conduct an assessment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership application. While there is a long road ahead, it is another sign of what Bosnia and Herzegovina can achieve when its leaders unite around a common purpose. We wish the country well as it pursues this path of integration in the months and years to come.

We welcome the progress Bosnia and Herzegovina has made on its reform agenda. That agenda provides a road map for strengthening public administration and improving socioeconomic conditions. However, maintaining momentum in the implementation of the agenda will require persistence and determination in the face of difficult decisions.

As Bosnia and Herzegovina pursues EU membership, we look forward to regional and international partners supporting the implementation of the reform agenda for the benefit of all of its citizens. We also hope to see accelerated progress on the five objectives and two conditions that are necessary for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

As we have heard today, the High Representative has reported actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina that directly challenge the authority of the State judicial institutions and the General Framework Agreement for Peace, including the holding of a referendum in contravention of a ruling of the Constitutional Court. Those activities are destabilizing and undermine the rule of law. We urge all political actors to respect State institutions and constitutional order. Disagreements should be dealt with through dialogue. We hope that divisive and inflammatory actions will be left behind and that leaders will choose to focus on what can be achieved by working together constructively. Divisive rhetoric also serves to undermine reconciliation efforts. More than two decades after the Dayton Peace Accords brought an end to a devastating conflict, true reconciliation remains an unfinished project.

We hope that all political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina can move beyond their points of difference and focus on fulfilling the aspiration of all of its citizens for stability and prosperity. An inclusive and united society will ultimately make the country stronger and more stable and will improve the welfare of all of its peoples. That is the future we wish to see for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Senegal.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the detailed briefing he has just given. The Senegalese

delegation welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2315 (2016). More than 20 years have passed since the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace, the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement. Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the persistence of some pitfalls, is continuing its inexorable march towards reunification and nation-building. The Senegalese delegation's statement will concentrate — as it did six months ago here in the Chamber (see S/PV.7688) — on all the political, economic, institutional and security dimensions of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the political level, progress has certainly been made. On the one hand, we have seen the publication, on 30 June, of the results of the population census that had been under way since 2013. On the other hand, on 2 October, local elections were held across the territory, except, unfortunately, in the city of Mostar. We must recognize that the past six months have also been marked by a resurgence in some tension among Bosnian, Croat and Serb communities.

The Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement, which ended one of the most terrible wars in the very heart of Europe, today seem fragile, not to say jeopardized, by the referendum organized on 25 September by the Republika Srpska. We warned against that referendum. The holding of the referendum constitutes an additional challenge with regard to carrying out the threats of secession proclaimed by the Republika Srpska — which, we remind the Council, had already called into question the competence of the Constitutional Court and the Office of the Prosecutor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the competence and the decisions of the High Representative.

My delegation is of the view that such a step undermines the work on the national construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which instead requires renewed commitments to strengthen the institutional architecture outlined in the Dayton-Paris accords, a calm atmosphere and frank dialogue among all the components of the State, all while respecting the Constitution and laws.

During the period under review, Bosnia and Herzegovina saw encouraging economic progress. In July, there was the adoption of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, followed on 23 August by the adoption of the Coordination Mechanism of the European Union. The country has also benefitted from support and assistance from the International Monetary Fund, which decided to earmark €553 million for a period of three years. There was also a notable increase in economic activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first seven months of 2016, when compared with the same period in 2015. The unemployment rate fell by 4.2 per cent, compared with the same months of 2015. At the same time, the trade deficit saw a downturn of 4.1 per cent, and industrial production increased by 4 per cent, compared with 2015. That progress has been consolidated with the ongoing assistance of the international community, prioritizing harmonious development, stability and the welfare of the population in order to contribute to mitigating the fragility of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region.

At the institutional level, the Senegalese delegation reaffirms its support for the High Representative and encourages all parties to cooperate with him. This has to do with the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as guaranteed by the General Framework Agreement for Peace, by the country's Constitution and by international law. It is in that spirit that the Senegalese delegation call on all three ethnic groups to collaborate more closely and to further cultivate a common will to guarantee a stable, strong and prosperous State that can take its rightful place among the world's nations.

It is in that spirit that my delegation commends the Council's decision to extend by 12 months the mandate of the European Union-led multinational stabilization force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR ALTHEA. As underscored by the report (S/2016/911, annex) of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the presence in the country of European Union military mission, which has an executive mandate, is still important in that it allows his Office and other participants from the international community to discharge their respective mandates and to reassure citizens from all ethnic groups regarding the safety and security of their environment.

The fight against terrorism is a challenge that Bosnia and Herzegovina must handle with discernment, in a context of the return of foreign fighters and complex migratory flows that constitute an additional risk for the security of the country and the whole region. It goes without saying that tangible results cannot be achieved and maintained in the struggle without the indispensible reinforcement, at all levels, of cooperation and dialogue

among the authorities of the different components of the State.

Senegal calls on the international community to continue supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts for greater resilience in the face of socioeconomic difficulties, support which should also involve capacity-building of the police force and the defence of the country so that they may overcome the strategic and operational shortcomings in a context where the terrorist threat remains pressing.

Finally, I would like to encourage the international community, and first and foremost the Council, to maintain its commitment and its current level of cooperation in its approach to the situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to assist the country in the positive trend it has demonstrated during the past two decades.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Vukašinović (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November and to wish you and your delegation every success. We welcome Mr. Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and have taken note of his report (S/2016/911, annex) on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, covering the period from 16 April to 21 October 2016.

Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomes the adoption of resolution 2315 (2016), which extends the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR ALTHEA, for an additional 12 months. It is important to emphasize that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a host country, has had respectable and fruitful cooperation with EUFOR ALTHEA, particularly in capacity-building and training of its armed forces, which has contributed to strengthening national ownership.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been peaceful and calm for a long period of time. That has been regularly reflected in the reports of the EUFOR ALTHEA mission, as well as in the relevant Security Council resolutions. The EUFOR ALTHEA mission is mandated to support the implementation of military aspects of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to ensure compliance with annexes 1-A and 2 of the Agreement. Over the past few years the EUFOR ALTHEA mission has been reconfigured so as to correspond to the situation on the ground, while the primary focus of the mission has shifted from deterrence and activities providing a safe and secure environment to capacity-building and training.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has come a long way from a security consumer to a troop-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping missions and, accordingly, a security provider to international peace and security. Today, military and police personnel from Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in United Nations peacekeeping missions worldwide.

On 2 October, democratic and credible local elections were held in a peaceful atmosphere in the country. Citizens throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina exercised their democratic rights and elected members of municipal councils and city assemblies, as well as mayors. Voter turnout was relatively high. Around 54 per cent of eligible citizens exercised their right to cast a vote.

With regard to the economic situation, it is important to underscore that Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy, like other economies in the region, has been affected by the global economic slowdown. However, macroeconomic data also show steady growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy in the first half of 2016. Compared with the first half of 2015, the economy grew by more than 2 per cent. At the same time, exports increased by 3 per cent.

During the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina made notable progress in the implementation of the Reform Agenda and continued its robust efforts aimed at achieving socioeconomic reforms, in particular, those necessary for integration into the European Union (EU). Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities at all levels have coordinated their efforts to ensure that the legal and fiscal framework is conducive to foreign investment, which is crucial for economic growth and new job creation.

With the backing of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Commission and Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Protocol on the adoption of the Stabilization and Association Agreement. Following the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union, the adoption of the Agreement became an

outstanding issue for Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of its path towards European integration. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a European integration coordination mechanism. More precisely, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Decision on the System of Coordination of the European Integration Process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which sets up an institutional and operational system of coordination, as well as modalities for coordination among Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions at various levels in relation to the process of European integration.

We would like to express our appreciation to the EU General Affairs Council decision of 20 September, which asked the European Commission to submit its opinion on the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for EU membership. This decision represents a major milestone for European integration. Also during the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Commission signed the agreement associating Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) programme. This agreement will enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to participate in the COSME programme and support national efforts aimed at improving the economy and the overall business environment.

Advancing friendly and constructive cooperation among countries of the region in areas of mutual interest is one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's main priorities. The prospect of European integration remains one of the most important factors for regional stability in the Western Balkans, whose States continue, within the framework of the Berlin process, to deepen collaboration in the field of transportation and energy as the most significant areas for economic growth.

Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to prosecute war crimes in its domestic courts. We reiterate that fighting impunity at the local level is vital for Bosnia and Herzegovina as a complex and multinational State. In that regard, implementing the national strategy for prosecuting war crimes, regardless of the national or religious origin of the perpetrators or victims, is essential for reconciliation and long-term stability.

Terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism together constitute one of the main security challenges at the global, regional and national levels. Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to fulfil its international obligations with regard to countering terrorism and violent extremism. In accordance with provisions of its amended penal code, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to prosecute individuals involved in fighting on behalf of terrorist and paramilitary organizations as well as those facilitating terrorist-fighter recruitment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's judicial and security institutions have been implementing its strategy for preventing and combating terrorism. It is important to emphasize that the strategy, together with security measures, includes preventive activities for deradicalization undertaken by national stakeholders, such as religious communities, educational institutions, civil-society organizations and the media. During the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina also made progress in combating organized crime, corruption and money-laundering.

Refugee and migrant flows in the Balkans remain to be a challenge to the States of the region and their institutions. We consider that only extensive and coordinated actions to address underlying causes of migration in the countries of origin at the global level can bring a satisfactory solution to the migrant crisis. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina has not been under direct pressure brought about by a significant migrant movement throughout its territory, I would like to stress that its institutions have undertaken a set of comprehensive measures to respond in case of massive influx of refugees, including measures in the humanitarian and security spheres. Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a strategy in the field of migration and asylum as well as a plan of action for the period 2016-2020. These instruments specify Bosnia and Herzegovina's policy in the field of migration and asylum in accordance with the highest European and international standards.

Finally, we would like to express the readiness of Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities to continue their work to secure a better and prosperous future for its citizens. At same time, we would also like to express our gratitude to international partners for supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina on that path.'

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro

and Albania, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

We thank the Security Council for unanimously adopting resolution 2315 (2016) renewing the mandate of the European Union-led peacekeeping force's Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina for one year. I join other speakers in welcoming High Representative Valentin Inzko back to the Council and assure him of the European Union's continued support. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina and thank him for his statement.

The year 2016 is a very important year for Bosnia and Herzegovina's European Union prospects. On 15 February, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted the country's application for EU membership. On 20 September, the EU Council decided to ask for the Commission's opinion on that membership application. This decision marks an important milestone for the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It follows the joint efforts of the country's leadership at all levels, demonstrating their commitment to the reforms, answering to citizens' demand for change and moving closer to the European Union.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has demonstrated a serious commitment and readiness to take difficult political decisions in order to meaningfully implement the Reform Agenda, an ambitious set of socioeconomic, rule of law and public administration reforms.

Together with our international partners, including the international financial institutions, we provided clear incentives to move forward with reforms of labour laws, the pension system and banking regulations, as well as long-term improvements of the business climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Currently, Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy is showing potential for growth in the next three to four years.

It is essential to keep the momentum going regarding both effective reforms and the EU integration process. The next stages will be equally demanding. The Reform Agenda will pass into its second stage, where much remains to be done to improve the political atmosphere in the country, rule of law issues and public administration. The reply of Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities to the comprehensive list of questions prepared by the European Commission will provide the basis for the assessment of the country's membership application and its capacity to meet the criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council of 1993 and the conditions of the Stabilization and Association process.

This is also an election year for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the local elections of 2 October were generally conducted in an orderly manner, they unfortunately brought to the surface persisting political divisions and challenges that have the potential to undermine stability in the country. The irregularities and isolated violent incidents that occurred should be investigated by the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities without any delay. Once more, elections in Mostar did not take place due to disagreements on the electoral requirements.

The European Union regrets the unlawful holding of an entity-level referendum on Republika Srpska Day, in violation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitutional Court decision of 17 September. The referendum caused unnecessary tensions and challenged the rule of law. Such action also distracts attention from the social and economic problems that people throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina face on a daily basis. The European Union encourages all political actors and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina to resolve this issue through the established legal processes and constructive dialogue and within the existing constitutional framework. It urges the parties, in accordance with the Peace Agreement, to abide by their commitment to cooperating fully with all institutions involved in the implementation of the peace settlement, as described in the Peace Agreement, including the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also more generally recalls that under the Peace Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of the two entities that exist legally by virtue of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution, which does not allow either entity to secede.

Next year will be an election-free year in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all parties to resolve pending issues that present a challenge to the respect of human rights and democratic institutions, and to embark on further and deeper socioeconomic reforms. Beyond the general need to ensure the further implementation of the adopted reforms and to build a solid track record, one area in need of a strong focus in the coming period is the rule of law, including the fight against corruption and organized crime, addressing any outstanding shortcomings of the judiciary and the need for its depoliticization, impartiality and independence, including in the prosecution of war crimes. In that

respect, the European Union is concerned over recent cases of the glorification of persons convicted for the gravest crimes against humanity. All political leaders and institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have a responsibility to assess wartime events honestly, in the interests of truth, reconciliation and a peaceful future.

I would also like to encourage the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to work towards the implementation of the rulings of court institutions, especially of the European Court of Human Rights case of *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* and related rulings, as well as of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will be an important factor in moving forward its European agenda and contribute to establishing a democratic and well-functioning society in which the equality of all constituent peoples and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina is warranted.

The European Union reiterates its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign and united country. The European Union will continue to use all available instruments to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and progress. While the overall security situation has remained relatively calm and stable, stability has not been fully entrenched. The European Union welcomes the continued presence of Operation Althea, which retains the capability to contribute to the deterrence capacity of the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities if the situation so requires, while focusing on capacity-building and training. In this regard, as part of the overall EU strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union confirms its readiness at this stage to maintain the executive military role of Operation Althea to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities in maintaining a safe and secure environment, under a renewed United Nations mandate.

The European Union invited its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to present a strategic review in autumn next year, as a basis for internal discussion within the EU on options for the future of the Operation, also bearing in mind Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress in its EU integration process and taking into account the security situation on the ground.

As the country's stability continues to strengthen and further progress is achieved in reforms and on the EU path, the European Union looks forward to continuing, in the appropriate forum, the discussion with the international community on the reconfiguration of the international presence. In this regard, the European Union calls on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet the outstanding objectives and conditions for the closure of the Office of the High Representative.

In conclusion, over the two decades that the Council has been discussing the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have witnessed substantial progress in the country in all fields: stability, democracy, security, economic development and EU integration. Still, much more needs to be accomplished in terms of improving the daily lives of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of reconciliation among citizens, as well as the responsible behaviour of all members of the political leadership in the country. But we believe that the progress the country achieves on its EU integration process will catalyse reconciliation and the resolution of chronic issues, addressing in parallel urgent demands for comprehensive reforms.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Serbia.

Mr. Vujic (Serbia): Regional stability and the development of all-round cooperation with its neighbours continue to be foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia. In this regard, my country perceives Bosnia and Herzegovina as a key bilateral partner in the pursuit of the policy of reconciliation and regional cooperation in the Balkans. The Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are parts of the same process of enlargement of and accession to the European Union (EU), and we welcome and applaud each and every step forward made by our neighbour in that direction, for we consider that the strengthening of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and South-East Europe in all its aspects is a beeline to membership of the Union. The potentials for such cooperation are multiple and many, all the more so as the policy agendas and visions of the future of the two countries are interchangeable, and sometimes even identical.

The Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the tragic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina some 20 years ago, has been the cornerstone of regional peace and stability. The Republic of Serbia signed the Agreement and is one of its guarantors. Abidance by the letter and spirit of the Agreement is as important today as it has been all these years. After all, it is only by honouring the Agreement and scrupulously implementing its

provisions that we can achieve genuine reconciliation, peace and stability, and, by extension, a better life for the people in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Republic of Serbia.

Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States is among the most important principles of international law and is a standard feature of international relations. In a region that had the ill-fortune of being riven by war, ethnic strife and political upheaval in its not-so-distant past, such principles and the future are of particular importance. A next-door neighbour and partner of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Serbia has therefore been staunchly committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, scrupulously strengthened and promoted close cooperation and worked consistently on establishing the bonds of friendship and building mutual confidence, which will not only benefit the relations between the two countries, but will also bring us closer to the family of European nations: integration and membership of the European Union.

But not every voyage is always unobstructed plain sailing. In recent months, political winds lifted the ship of the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and messages that we believe belong in the past were sent. Relations among Bosnia and Herzegovina constituent peoples and its entities were unnecessarily disrupted and the constructive approach that we had all come to expect was not visible. Yet, just as it always has in the past, the Republic of Serbia made every effort to stabilize the situation, calm political passions and overcome differences by agreement, with one all-important goal in mind — that of maintaining peace, bringing progress and ensuring a better future for the people of the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It did so by scrupulously respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbour and, lest it should slip the Council's attention, the effort was recognized far and wide.

Ever since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, it has been proved time and again that the best way to address and resolve outstanding internal issues and the subjects of disagreements among the constituent peoples and the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina is though dialogue and agreement. In my country's opinion, one such issue is the marking of the Republic of Srpska Day. We therefore support active dialogue as the best way to find acceptable and applicable solutions — a dialogue that implies the readiness of all sides to mutually respect and understand one another. That is in the best interests of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the only way for the country's integration into larger organizations, including the European Union.

As an EU candidate country, the Republic of Serbia has begun the EU membership negotiation process and undertaken relevant reforms. It considers them as policy priorities, yet, all the same, it supports its neighbours in their own activities, in the belief that they will bring about integration in those countries, as well as in the entire region of the Western Balkans, in the European Union. To that end, the Republic of Serbia welcomes the decision of the European Union of 20 September to accept the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for membership of the European Union, as well as the agreements reached inside the country providing for coordination mechanisms within the process of European integration. We are ready to intensify our cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina in a field in which formal conditions exist, including a relevant memorandum of understanding and an action plan. Let me point out that ongoing cooperation has evolved within the framework of regional programmes financed by the Instrument of Pre-Accession funds.

The Western Balkans has embarked irreversibly on the road to reconciliation, stability and integration, and European integration in particular. Yet what we need now, perhaps more than ever before, is to build mutual confidence among the three constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its two entities. The country is home to a large number of Serbs, and it is our earnest expectation and hope that they will cooperate with their compatriot Bosniacs and Croats ever more closely and intensely. Proceeding from the Dayton Agreement, Serbia maintains, develops and deepens transparent relations with the Republic of Srpska, while all along striving to establish and expand cooperation with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well. In that context, building confidence and promoting understanding among the peoples and entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are of paramount importance for their work together and the taking of joint decisions aimed at bringing about a better life for all of the citizens of that country.

The Republic of Serbia has always worked avidly on establishing better communications and promoting political dialogue with Bosnia and Herzegovina,

considering them the basic instruments for the creation of positive relations between the two countries. To that end, many State or Government officials from the Republic of Serbia visited Bosnia and Herzegovina or played host to their respective counterparts.

On 29 May, the President of the Republic of Serbia attended the summit of the Brdo-Brijuni process in Sarajevo and the Summit100 Business Leaders in Southeast Europe the day before. During the visit, the President of the Republic of Serbia reiterated the importance that the Republic of Serbia attaches to the promotion of regional cooperation and relations, particularly with Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the two sides expressed readiness to prepare an official visit of the Serbian President to Sarajevo.

On 20 September, speaking in New York alongside the Mayor of Srebrenica to the panel on reconciliation in the Western Balkans 20 years after the Dayton Agreement, organized by the Clinton Foundation, the Serbian Prime Minister said that we needed each other and that we had to live together, not beside each other. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia added that he would otherwise be concerned about the future of the Western Balkans.

On 25 July, the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić, led a Serbian delegation to a ministerial meeting of the Central European Initiative in Banja Luka on 16 June. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina also visited Belgrade on 26 July.

Traditionally, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been one of the Republic of Serbia's most important foreign trade partners. Both countries are very interested in building and rebuilding infrastructure and a bridge over the Drina River between Ljubovija in Serbia, and Bratunac in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the process of construction, while the work on energy-generating projects on that river is ongoing. Cooperation between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of joint ventures is also being intensified. A meeting of the Trilateral Trade Committee of the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey and an accompanying business forum were held in Ankara on 25 October, and a joint trade and tourist office of the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was opened in Istanbul on 26 October.

Bringing people together and linking regions and their economies is the most important task that the Republic of Serbia has undertaken to promote in the Western Balkans. I trust and believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Serbia's other neighbours, are agreed that we need to continue to work on delivering results. We made a commitment to improve regional cooperation and to take measures to realize numerous projects, especially in the fields of infrastructure, transport and energy. Alongside the commitment of my country to peace, reconciliation, stability and cooperation, they will help us strengthen the bonds of friendship and good-neighbourliness and facilitate our journey to regional and transregional integration.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Let be start by congratulating you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also thank the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Inzko, for his important report (S/2016/911, annx) and his valuable work.

Croatia aligns itself with statement delivered by the observer of the European Union (EU) and I would like to make some remarks in its national capacity.

As a signatory to the Dayton Peace Agreement, Croatia bears a special responsibility towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina's first EU neighbour, also bears a special responsibility towards Croats as one of the constituent peoples, whose genuine institutional equality with the other two peoples and all citizens will enable a more functional, viable and efficient, and thus stable, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina are therefore a foreign policy priority and its integration into the European Union and NATO a strategic goal of the Republic of Croatia. This was clearly demonstrated by the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first country that the new Prime Minister of Croatia visited after taking office. A stable, peaceful and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina contributes to the stability of South-East Europe as well as to that of the European Union as a whole.

The European and Euro-Atlantic perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a goal that Croatia will

continue to staunchly support. We see the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the EU and NATO as the best catalyst for addressing internal outstanding issues as well as a safeguard for ensuring further democratization, the strengthening of institutions, freedom of the media and an independent judiciary.

We welcome the September conclusions of the Council of the EU, which tasked the Commission with preparing an opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership in the EU. This is an important milestone for Bosnia and Herzegovina because it reaffirms its commitment to the process of European integration, including European values and standards. This important development is the result of the hard work and commitment of the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we commend them for that.

Steps forward have been taken on the Reform Agenda-related laws that have been adopted at both the State and entity level. The credibility and sustainability of reforms must be sustained in the interest of all citizens, the State itself and regional stability.

The agreement on the coordination mechanism achieved in July is of great importance for the credible implementation of the Stabilization Association Agreement and, later, the negotiations with the EU. Croatia is looking forward to the finalization of the process of the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with a swift signing and the provisional application of the Protocol.

We can say that the new EU approach has proved effective and is yielding its initial results. Additionally, it has helped Bosnia and Herzegovina step out of the stalemate and bring the country to the next stage of its relations with the European Union.

We have invested a great deal in Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability and in fostering the EU agenda through all of the EU's instruments, including through the Special Representative and Operation Althea of the European Union-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR). It is important for the EU to remain actively engaged in preserving safety and security in Bosnia and Herzegovina; that is why we support the extension of the executive mandate of EUFOR Althea and its substantial contribution.

In order for Bosnia and Herzegovina successfully to address all of the challenges that it will face at the next stage of the European integration process, all available European tools and policies should be put at its disposal. Croatia will, for its part, make available its expertise and know-how from our accession process.

The progress made on the European path has not been mirrored by internal developments. On the contrary, some of the internal political dynamics are cause for concern. We have said it before and we will say it again: the referendum held in Republika Srpska runs counter to the decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and undermines the stability of the country. Such activities challenge the founding principles of the Dayton Peace Agreement and are unconstitutional and dangerous.

Local elections, while on the whole conducted in a peaceful and orderly way, revealed divisions and mistrust in an environment in which it is crucial to promote tolerance and coexistence. Moreover, the incident that took place in Stolac involved a violent physical assault against a representative of the Central Election Commission. Any violence or election irregularities should be condemned in the clearest possible terms. We trust the local institutions to find institutional solutions to problems as well as to investigate and prosecute unlawful activities.

We also regret the fact that the elections in Mostar were not held together with the local elections in the rest of the country, on 2 October. We encourage the finding of a solution for the implementation of the Constitutional Court ruling on Mostar, so that its citizens are not deprived of their right to vote.

Croatia encourages the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement the *Sejdić and Finci* ruling in order to move forward its European agenda and contribute to establishing a democratic and well-functioning society in which the equality of all constituent peoples and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina is guaranteed and safeguarded.

Finally, the rule of law must be promoted and protected, including the fight against corruption and organized crime, while all outstanding deficiencies of the judiciary must be addressed. In this regard, the need for the depoliticization of the judiciary and for its impartiality and independence, especially in the prosecution of war crimes, should receive strong focus.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, a State with a 1,000-kilometre-long land border with Croatia and the

EU, remains our priority, and we shall spare no effort to help our neighbour on its path towards enhanced stability and long-term prosperity.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.